

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 1-17 are currently pending in this application. Applicants respectfully request reconsideration in light of the following remarks.

The Final Office Action imposed a number of prior-art rejections based upon 35 U.S.C. Sections 102(e) and 103(a). It is noted that independent Claim 1 was only rejected as being anticipated by Ikeda et al. (USPN 2003/0184339) under 35 U.S.C. Section 102(e).

Ikeda et al, however, has a PCT filing date of May 24, 2002. Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 1 using this reference appears to be without merit, since the Ikeda et al. relevant priority date of May 24, 2002 is less than one year before the Applicants' November 3, 2003 filing date of the current application and since Applicants invented the current invention before that priority date.

Applicants submit herewith a Declaration under 37 C.F.R. 1.131, establishing that the invention by Applicants of the presently claimed patent application occurred before the relevant priority date of the Ikeda et al. patent. Accordingly, the Ikeda et al. reference does not appear to qualify as prior art under 35 U.S.C. 102(e), since it is not a patent granted on an application for patent by another filed in the United States before the invention by the Applicants for patent.

With respect to the dependent claims, Applicants respectfully submit that each of these claims would appear to be patentable not only by virtue of its dependency upon the respective base Claim 1, but also for the totality of features recited therein.

In light of the above remarks, Applicants respectfully submit that Claims 1-17, as currently presented, are in condition for allowance. Reconsideration and withdrawal of all outstanding rejections is respectfully requested.

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any needed fees to deposit account 50-1600.

Respectfully submitted,



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